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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are offered for college professors conducting a college course for credit to a group of teachers on-site in their school. The problems implicit in this situation are pointed out, and specific recommendations are made for overcoming them. (JD)

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TEACHING INSERVICE COURSES IN THE FIELD

Some Guidelines for College Faculty

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Although the Rhode Island College Teacher Corps Project has had a variety of inservice activities over the past two years, the most common activity has still been the after-school class, a course bearing college credit given to teachers after the regular school day. This is also the most common form of inservice program offered by institutions of higher education, in general. One of the things that we have tried to develop over the past two years as part of the Teacher Corps Project is information about successful college teaching in the field. We have been interested in determining what was so different about teaching graduate level courses in the field compared to teaching them on the college campus. We have also been interested in establishing some guidelines that might be useful for college instructors with little field-based experience who anticipated working in an inservice program.

One of the things which is different about teaching field-based college courses involves territoriality. Teaching in the field means that one is working in an environment which is familiar to the learners and usually unfamiliar to the professor. It is generally the inservice teachers who are more comfortable in the setting, and who have greater control over the environment than does the college instructor.

Another difference is the composition of the class. The inservice course usually involves a group of teachers who know each other well, share a great deal, and bring with them the shared experiences of the school day.

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When teaching on campus to a variety of people from a variety of backgrounds or school settings, the possibility of the whole class having a particularly good or bad day is reduced.

The group dynamics of an inservice course are different. Since the inservice teachers know each other very well and bring with them the same generalized perspective, the normal mix of opinions and points of view is reduced. Furthermore, the group has an identity of its own, well established before the college instructor enters the class. This tends to exaggerate the perception of the instructor as an outsider.

Teachers share a greater sense of ownership of a course when it is part of a comprehensive inservice program. Usually the teachers have been involved in the planning and selection of the course offering. They have selected a course on the basis of expectations that it will meet their specific needs. This places a great deal of pressure on the college instructor to meet those specific needs of the teachers in the course. This sense of ownership leads to perceptions of the distribution of power and the instructor's authority which are different when compared to teaching on the college campus.

Teaching on-site in a school means that the college person must operate with far less of the college support to which he/she may be accustomed. All of the familiar things: the classroom, the convenient office, the availability of the library, and even the filing system are not at his/her immediate disposal. There is a greater need for flexibility, and an ability to operate out of a briefcase.

There is usually greater pressure placed on the professor to alter course content to be responsive to the needs of teachers. The teachers have expectations that the inservice course will be geared to their specific situation.

At the same time the course bearing college credit must be seen as legitimate on the part of the college department which approves it for credit. There is great pressure from the college department to include a strong theoretical base as part of the content and to maintain as much as possible of the "approved" course objectives. This places the inservice instructor in the situation where the inservice teachers require needs responsiveness while the college department demands substantial theoretical content. To satisfy both groups requires imagination and a constant awareness of the objectives of the course.

Faced with this different environment and different requirements, how can a college instructor work successfully in an inservice course? Our experiences with both successful and unsucessful instructors has lead us to the development of some guidelines for teaching college courses in the field.

1. Become familiar with the new environment. It is necessary to learn the people and the politics of the school in which the inservice course is being taught. Through discreet questioning it is possible to quickly determine the general attitudes of faculty toward each other, towards programs and administration. This is helpful in avoiding sensitive areas which might detract from the success of the course.

2. Involve the inservice teachers as much as possible in developing the content of the course. An error made by some college instructors is to take a syllabus or course outline which has been used for a course on campus and simply present it to the teachers unchanged. This usually does not set well with the teachers and they will respond by considering the college instructors as insensitive to their needs. In Gordon Lawrence's study of successful inservice programs, he found that when

teachers participated in developing the content of the course, the program was successful more often than when they were not involved.[1] One suggestion would be to have the first class one in which there is a negotiation between the instructor and the teachers about the content of the course with the aim of reaching an agreement on content and structure which satisfies both teachers' needs and college requirements.

3. The college instructor should describe himself as a learner and honestly believe it. The inservice teachers generally feel that they know more about their own students in their own school than does the college instructor. They may perceive him as an expert in theory and one with greater experience generally, but do not consider any outsider as an expert on the children they deal with every day. If the college instructor identifies himself as one who is still learning and can learn a great deal from the teachers about the children in their care then a climate is set in which there develops an open and honest exchange.

4. Utilize an <u>inductive</u> approach to theory rather than <u>deductive</u>. Often college instructors will turn off teachers and lose momentum in the course because they begin the first half of the semester by presenting theory with the promise of addressing practice as related to that school at some later date. Often teachers lose interest and are lost by the time the things are discussed that they find relevant for their use. One can keep teachers' attention and interest by focusing on the issues and problems which they are involved with every day and using these to arrive at theoretical constructs. At the very least, the instructor

should intersperse practice and theory to such an extent that teachers perceive that he/she is addressing their needs.

5. Utilize teachers as resources wherever possible. There is a wealth of talent and expertise in any given inservice class population. By utilizing the strengths of the teachers, general learning is improved as well as the class climate.

6. Whenever possible, the instructor should be a model of what he/she is attempting to do or teach. The height of absurdity is the instructor who lectures on individualized instruction or who teaches a course all alone for the entire semester on the topic of team teaching.

7. Assign papers or other course assignments that can lead to an action plan or usefulness by individual teachers. Assigning a paper, due at the end of the semester, which has no relationship to the teachers' work is a waste of time. It doesn't take too much imagination to develop course requirements that demonstrate an understanding of a theoretical base and yet can be applicable to the specific school situation in which the teachers work.

8. Once course content, organization, and requirements have been negotiated and agreed to, stay with the plan. If there is a change in any of the course plans, this should be negotiated with the teachers. The surest way to lose credibility is to unilaterally change the plan or add a new requirement after going through the process of negotiation.

9. Don't overuse your title. This is often a special point of irritation to teachers. The use of the title of "Doctor" and "Professor" in an inservice setting leads towards hierarchical distinctions and away from the sense of a collaborative venture. A mutual comfort level can

usually be reached.

10. Make materials available for teachers on site. Teachers are tired at the end of the day. It is difficult enough for them to try to deal with materials and new ideas at that time. The added burden of having to go to a library on campus or to find other materials for use in the course away from the school site does not contribute to a maximized learning environment.

11. Don't overuse jargon and be sure that everyone is using the educational terms in the same way. Educational jargon is constantly changing. Teachers in the field may be adhering to meanings of terms which have changed or are little used. If the college person assumes, without verification, that everyone understands the terms in the same way that he does, he may find out later that he has either turned people off or has built a course on a very weak foundation of understanding.

Field teaching is different from on campus teaching. Accommodations of the differences in the field is essential to the successful learning of the teachers. Faculty who are effective in field teachers have made the necessary changes and become valuable resources in Teacher Corps Projects.

Reference:

[1]Patterns of Effective Inservice Education. Florida Educational Research and Development Program, Florida Department of Education, 1974.